

Jeopardy Assessment

Proposed Incidental Take Authorization: State Highway 35 Bridge Replacements (ITP 331)

Species: Blanchard's Cricket Frog

Location: Buffalo County

Background

Project Information

This project consists of reconstructing three separate bridges that encompass an overall distance of 3.139 miles (16,575 feet) along STH 35 in Buffalo County. The southernmost bridge will have a project length of 0.055 miles (approximately 290 feet), the second bridge will have a project length of 0.082 miles (approximately 440 feet), and the northernmost bridge will have a project length of 0.078 miles (approximately 410 feet). All these individual bridge sub-projects will result in a project total length of reconstructed roadway equal to 0.215 miles or approximately 1,140 feet. The southernmost bridge and the central bridge are located within suitable habitat for the Blanchard's cricket frog.

Species Information

The Blanchard's cricket frog (*Acris blanchardi*), an endangered species in Wisconsin, prefers ponds, lakes, and a variety of habitats along and adjacent to streams and rivers including, marshes, fens, sedge meadows, low prairies, and exposed mud flats. The species tends to breed in quiet water (no or low flow) and may also move from streams and rivers to adjacent wetlands and ponds. Cricket frogs cannot tolerate freezing or complete inundation for more than 24 hours during the winter and thus seek a variety of microhabitats that provide suitable overwintering conditions, including crayfish burrows, small mammal burrows, rotted-out root channels, seepage areas where groundwater flow prevents freezing at the surface or spaces created by sloughing streambanks. Cricket frogs are active from early March through November. Breeding can occur from mid-May through mid-August, with some larvae not transforming until late September.

Conservation Measures

1. All project-related disturbance impacting standing water must take place during the frog's active season (April 8-October 15), but outside of the frog's breeding season (May 20-August 15). This results in a window of April 8-May 19 and August 16-October 15.
2. All project-related disturbance not impacting standing water (e.g., uplands) must take place during the frog's active season (April 8-October 15), with no restrictions related to the breeding season.
3. Cricket frog removals will be conducted by a qualified biologist prior to project-related disturbance. To enable locating the frogs, vegetation in the work area will be mowed to a height of 6-inches or less by use of non-suction mowing equipment, such as a string trimmer (weed whacker).
4. For riprap and stream crossing projects, cricket frog removals will be conducted in the disturbance footprint by an environmental monitor prior to each work day/restoration activity. All cricket frogs (and preferably other amphibians and reptiles) found will be immediately removed from the disturbance area and relocated to suitable habitat at least 100 meters downstream from the project site. If cricket frogs are found on the first walk-through of the area, a second walk-

through will be conducted. This process should continue until the biologist feels confident he/she has removed as many cricket frogs as possible from the disturbance area. All cricket frogs removed will be recorded (total number removed per walk-through, i.e., 2 cricket frogs removed on first walk-through, 1 cricket frog removed on second walk-through and 0 cricket frogs removed on third walk-through) and reported to the Endangered Resources Transportation Liaison (stacy.rowe@wi.gov) on a weekly basis.

5. The environmental monitor must have field experience with the cricket frog and its habitat and possess a valid Endangered/Threatened (E/T) Permit or similar authorization for cricket frog removals.
6. All dead Blanchard's cricket frog found on site throughout the course of the project must be recorded (species, approximate age, possible cause of death), photographed, and reported to the Endangered Resources Transportation Liaison (stacy.rowe@wi.gov) at the conclusion of the project.
7. Plastic or polypropylene netting associated with erosion matting (also known as an erosion control blanket or erosion mesh netting) without independent movement of strands can easily entrap snakes and other wildlife moving through the area, and cause dehydration, desiccation, and eventually mortality. Biodegradable jute/twine netting with the "leno" or "gauze" weave (contains strands that are able to move independently) has the least impact on snakes. If erosion matting will be used for this project, use the following matting (or something similar): American Excelsior "FibreNet" or "NetFree" products; East Coast Erosion biodegradable jute products; Erosion Tech biodegradable jute products; ErosionControlBlanket.com biodegradable leno weave products; North American Green S75BN, S150BN, SC150BN or C125BN; or Western Excelsior "All Natural" products.
8. Upon completion of the project, all areas of temporary disturbance will be restored to pre-existing (or better) conditions.
9. For instream work, turbidity will be minimized by use of appropriate erosion control best management practices. These include turbidity barrier, erosion matting (as noted above), mulch with temporary seeding and silt fence.
10. After May 15th (fish restrictions) and prior to May 20th, turbidity barrier will be wrapped tightly around the pier columns that are within the waterway to prevent egg deposition on the columns. The turbidity barrier will be loosened immediately prior to pier removal operations. The turbidity barrier will be maintained, always, to prevent sediment from escaping the containment during pier removal operations.
11. All riprap above the OHWM will be top dressed with 1-1/4 Inch Base Aggregate Dense and seeded with WisDOT Seed Mixture #75.
12. To mitigate for the loss of 0.269 acres of cricket frog habitat, scrapes will be constructed at a 1:1 ratio and will be seeded with WisDOT Seed Mixture #75. Scrapes will be within 75 feet of a cricket frog stream/creek/river and will be at least 3 feet deep. Scrape plans and location details will be finalized by the applicant and approved by the ER Transportation Liaison prior to the end of this project.
13. Any areas of exposed soil will be seeded with DOT seed mixture #75.
14. Minor changes can be made to this Conservation Plan due to unforeseen circumstances if agreed upon in writing (e.g. email correspondence) by the applicant and WI DNR's ER Transportation Liaison.

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The proposed activity will minimize and mitigate impacts to the Blanchard's cricket frog and as a result, we anticipate that take of Blanchard's cricket frogs will be low. The department has determined that the proposed activity is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence and recovery of the Blanchard's cricket frog, or the whole plant-animal community of which it is a part, within this state and the activity is not likely to result in the destruction or adverse modification of a habitat that is critical to the continued existence of the endangered species within the state. The department has also determined that the proposed activity provides a benefit to public health, safety or welfare that justifies the activity.